

**Oral History Interview of
Tommy Fondren**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
July 27, 2015
Lorenzo, Texas**

**Part of the:
*General Southwest Collection Interviews***

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Tommy Fondren, who discuss his ancestry, upbringing, his time in the military, and his experiences living and flying in West Texas.

Length of Interview: 02:10:43

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Keywords

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is July 27, 2015, and this is David Marshall interview Tommy Fondren at his office in downtown Lorenzo, Texas. Let's just start by getting a little biographical information on you so we have information on the person being interviewed. Maybe start with your date and place of birth.

Tommy Fondren (TF):

I was born March 23, 1930, a mile south of Estacado.

DM:

Okay, Estacado is the community—

TF:

My grandfather's home.

DM:

Oh, okay.

TF:

They tell me, I don't remember it, but they tell me it snowed that night. The doctor came from Rawls, supposedly it snowed there. It was kind of a unique place where I was born. The house was in Crosby County and the water well was in Lubbock County. I came into this world in Crosby County, and was cleaned up with water from Lubbock County.

DM:

What was your grandfather's house like? Do you remember anything about that house?

TF:

Well, I've got a picture of it. I've got to find it somewhere here. It was a typical old Quaker-type house. It had two front doors and a porch on the front. It had an orchard out there. The Quakers was real good about planting orchards. They liked fruit and they knew it was a diet thing. They planted orchards.

DM:

You also said last time, when we were looking last week at the community, and you pointed out some groves of bodarks¹ out there.

¹ *Maclura pomifera*, commonly called Osage orange, horse apple, or bodark, a small deciduous tree.

TF:

They planted those for wind breaks.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

TF:

And now I don't know where they got that many seedling of bodarks to plant them, but at one time, there were some places here that had a mile of bodark hedges.

DM:

I wonder if they brought horse apples in with them and just planted them that way.

TF:

I don't know how they got them. I figured they grewed on a seedling of some sort, a plant.

DM:

I see.

TF:

But you know, it was quite a chore to plant a mile of anything.

DM:

Yeah, that's a lot. Now, when you see these out there in the countryside, that means there was a homestead there, a Quaker house there maybe.

TF:

Well, the Quakers had a college at one time and that college had a row of bodark trees. They were more or less at random. It was a windbreak of what they were trying to plant or what they were trying to accomplish. Well, later on when they came in here and planted elm tree. I never understood this, but the bodark tree never did grow up in sand dunes, but the elm trees blew up in sand dunes. The sand attracted to those elms and they would get ten foot high.

DM:

Golly.

TF:

The bodark tree was always leveled out. I never did understand that.

DM:

When did they start coming in with the elm trees?

TF:

I don't know, but the elm tree was going to be like a government—it would come through like FSA today, the Farm Service Agency. It was a method of trying to make windbreaks. It was trying to slow this wind down.

DM:

Okay, so the Quakers started this early on, just after arrival with bodarks.

TF:

The Quakers probably got a pretty good education. When they first came here, there was four families. They had pre-dug that well in the Estacado. Actually, I think the man that lived there had pre-dug that well. So, I went to the Estacado because of the water. But three of those families stayed in tents that winter. Paris Cox built the sod house. The sod house was kind of unusual. They came in covered wagons. With those sod houses, they took the tarp off the covered wagon and used it for the roof. That's what they used for a roof. That winter was harsh, that was a harsh winter.

DM:

Now, what winter was that? What year was that?

TF:

Eighteen seventy-nine. It was a harsh winter and the people in the tents had a real tough time. You know, and another factor involved in that was finding enough buffalo chips and keeping them dry so you could have fires. Big stumbling block as a settler here, there was no timber, there was no creeks, there wasn't any landmarks, you could get lost because there was nothing to tide you. But anyhow, the Quakers and the first four families, they had a harsh winter. In the spring, the first sandstorm got all three tents and scattered all their belongings across the prairie. When they gathered it all up and got those wagons loaded, they went back to Indiana and left old Paris Cox out here by himself. Tough pickle. (laughs) We're sissies. If you think about it, Paris talks about being out here. Going home to Indiana, promoting this thing, and coming back and finding the well that he had dug.

DM:

How do you think he found that well?

TF:

I don't know how in the world, because the big falling out was, there was no landmarks out here. There wasn't a set of timber, over here and there wasn't a mountain anywhere to look at, it was just flat plains. One guy at Estacado, in the first months, for the second months stayed over winter, he went out chasing ducks. He shot at ducks and they went to another lake and he followed them. He followed those ducks around before he was lost. He didn't know where he was. The people back at Estacado didn't know where he was either, you know? There was quite a struggle finding that man and getting him back. He didn't have a real good outing.

DM:

At one point it looks like another, too, I guess.

TF:

Well yeah, back in those days; when my grandfather came out here in 1916, he had a story told that when he rode up on the Caprock down here in McGuffin that he was riding a long-legged gray horse and the grass was striking the horse's belly and said there wasn't anything to look at. I mean, it was an ocean of grass, and it was late in the afternoon, and the wind was blowing, and he said it was just an ocean of grass.

DM:

What did he come out here for?

TF:

Hunting a better place out.

DM:

Finding a place to what?

TF:

Hunting a better place.

DM:

Hunting a better place. Was he wanting to ranch or something?

TF:

Farmer.

DM:

Farmer, what was his name?

TF:

Hooks, Hooks, H.S. Hooks, Henry Hooks.

DM:

H.S Hooks, so it's your mamma's father?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

You know, it was a funny thing about this country. Land wasn't rented. You didn't read about these people renting land, they bought land. Oh, and this land, Paris Cox acquired a huge amount of land and he could sell. That's how he developed this country. When he'd come out and buffalo hunt, he fell in love with the High Plains, so he went back through Austin and tied up this land, and *then* went. So then Paris Cox was actually the developer, I guess, from hindsight, and if you needed land you could go to him, and you could buy land off of Paris Cox, which was the State of Texas.

DM:

Well now, somehow he located a place to dig a well or Hank Smith did. Can you tell me that story about how Hank Smith came out and dug that?

TF:

No, I think they dug it wherever they wanted to. I don't think they wedged or did anything along that line. I think they just put a tent on the place. I don't think from what I read that Paris Cox dictated where he wanted the well, but then Hank looked at this thing and thought, "This would be a good spot, right?"

DM:

Okay.

TF:

So he dug the well there. That turned out to be the center of the community. The courthouse was by the well, and the business district built around the well, and the houses around that.

DM:

And eventually that school, that school was pretty close to the well, too, isn't it?

TF:

No.

DM:

No.

TF:

No, the college, they called it, Central Plains Academy. There was probably half a mile north of town and it sat off out there by itself. Now, the hospital, we hadn't talked about a hospital, but they had a hospital back in those days. And that hospital was about four miles from east of Estacado. Later on, at one time, the hospital was tied to Estacado through barbed wire as a telephone line.

DM:

Well, why did they build a hospital so far out, I wonder?

TF:

Now, don't ask me.

DM:

From the college?

TF:

I'm going to say that's where the doctor could drive in. Now, I've got pictures of the hospital.

DM:

It makes you wonder if someone was trying to get away from Paris Cox's prices, maybe, and went and claimed their own land, I don't know.

TF:

No, I don't know either. A medical doctor you'd think you'd need it in the center of population. This old building that they have the hospital, they lived in it, but it was just a two-story building. It's just an old box building and it was a hospital. They doctored it and had some trees around it and they doctored around it when it was hot.

DM:

Is there any remains of that out there?

TF:

It burned.

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DM:

It burned.

TF:

Now, I remember it, it lasted a long time.

DM:

Did you ever see any pictures of it?

TF:

I have some pictures.

DM:

Now what about school? Did you ever see any photographs of the school? I mean of the college?

TF:

No, and the college may have been in church buildings, I don't know. I need to do some more looking on that, but the college when it first got here, when it first started, those kids had to come room and board someone. They had to, the kids that came from Rawls, had to have room and board and what had been. I'm not sure how they handled all that, but I do know that kids that came from any distance at all had to live with another family and go to school.

DM:

I see, okay. Was it a Quaker-operated college?

TF:

Yes.

DM:

Okay, alright. Now, they built a school eventually with a teacherage, but that was right in town, is that correct?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

And that's by the well?

TF:

Yeah, it was in—well, on the map—the first schools kind of started off in whatever they were using for the church. Then there's things proved—the first real school house that comes to my mind was a three-story building. We've got pictures of it.

DM:

Is it a wooden building?

TF:

They were wooden buildings.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

My mother—I have somewhere I have some before my mother graduated from that school.

DM:

So your granddad came up from Cosby and he went straight from Estacado, I guess. Is that what happened?

TF:

I don't know how he—he came up through that country and was apparently traveling alone. This Paris Cox had done a lot of advertising. I know the reason he was coming to Estacado because there was a settlement and cheap land. You could get cheap land. And all of that land was bought on terms, it was patented. It didn't have a title; as such it had a patent. This first land was patent land. So I'm going to say my granddad knew about this settlement out here and he settled on the corner section, he bought the corner section where the Baptist church sits today. He bought that. And about that, the house was on the southeast corner of quarter section.

DM:

Was quarter section the standard size if you wanted to farm in this country back then?

TF:

One hundred and six, yeah.

DM:

That'd be enough to keep you busy, wouldn't it?

TF:

Yeah, with the teams and what-have-you. But only these houses had orchards. Now there's a funny story, it's a joke kind of story, but—and it was true. There was a family out there that had a big orchard. And back in the tame days, farming with these teams, the wives and there was hands. They had personnel that worked for them. And the people that worked for them, they went to the house for lunch. The wives furnished lunch. I mean, that was part of the deal. They had lunch and you left, you unharnessed the teams, and you let the teams drink and eat and roll in the dirt. But this man was pretty conservative; so while the teams was resting, the hands hoed the orchard (laughs).

DM:

He was going to get his money's worth, huh.

TF:

I'm told that's a true story. They tell that from the truth. I won't tell any names. (laughs)

DM:

What about these orchards? What kind of fruit trees were they growing up there?

TF:

Oh, there was apples and peaches and plums and grapes.

DM:

Any of them still remaining up there? Do you still see any orchards in that area?

TF:

No, they're gone; they've been gone a long time.

DM:

You've got to keep water to them, so.

TF:

There wasn't—when I got big enough to know, like '35, '36, '37, along in there, most of those orchards were even gone then. And in that time period, people in Blanco Canyon, my family knew someone going down there to the point that there was a lot of wild grapes in Blanco Canyon and there was a lot of wild plums. I remember us going down there and picking plums to make plum jam. You know, and I think back about that now, I don't know why we all didn't get rattlesnake bit.

DM:

I know.

TF:

And plum picking.

DM:

I'll tell you for sure. Oh boy.

TF:

And we would also go fishing down there. If you went to—no, we had a lot of fish back in those days, because in early 1900's, there was a drilling rig that came in here. And the drilling rig can go out to the farm and drill you a well that you can put a windmill on. That was really part of the mesa of Estacado, is the fact that you can live on your farm and you didn't have to live in town because of water.

DM:

Right.

TF:

So they—

DM:

Now these wells, how deep were these windmill wells?

TF:

Eighty foot.

DM:

Eighty foot, which is about what the hand-dug one at Estacado was?

TF:

That first strata of water here, we called it "windmill water," and it was about eighty foot. Some of it was sixty. I mean, it varied, but sixty to eighty foot. The average well, we called them "eighty-foot wells."

DM:

How far do you have to go now to get water in that country?

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TF:

Well, if you drill a house well now, you're drilling it just like an irrigation well. You drill it to a red bed.

DM:

To what?

TF:

A red bed, a 340-foot or something like that, you drill it that day. Because when the windmill water, when all of the irrigation wells dry up and it's in the air, the windmill water goes down. And your windmill water around Lubbock—some of them are complaining every summer that their wells go dry, but that's that windmill water. We drill irrigation [wells]. When I had an irrigation well, for a long time, if you went up to it anytime in the winter, fall, or the spring, you could hear water flowing. You could hear it falling. And now there's actually windmill water falling into that well.

DM:

I see, from sixty to eighty feet falling into a deeper well.

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay, now this well that Hank Smith dug, you said that it was hand dug, is that right?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you have any idea what the diameter was? It was eight feet deep or so.

TF:

No, nothing about that.

DM:

But you said some of them was rock-lined?

TF:

They rocked it about twenty foot from the bottom.

DM:

Right, okay.

TF:

They dug down so deep and I don't know the area of that. I know they wanted to rock it up high to keep it from caving in, but then they rocked it about twenty foot from the bottom. I don't know what it was to retain the water. I don't know why, but that's the storage that you pick up.

DM:

Anyway, a hand dug well eighty foot deep, twenty feet of rock; that sounds like a lot of work.

TF:

Yeah, and somewhere I can go back and tell you what that first well cost.

DM:

Oh really?

TF:

I'm trying to think that you charged three dollars a foot.

DM:

Two hundred and forty bucks for the whole thing and then rocking.

TF:

You know, Hank Smith, had this — and I can't recall the man's name, but he had a man that stayed with him. He wasn't family, but he was more of a hired hand, but he lived with him. He and Hank Smith know a lot of that.

DM:

By the way, we were talking about Hank Smith last week, and his place out there, and how it's all grown up in mesquites now. Last time I saw it, it was pretty well covered in mesquites off the canyon.

TF:

All of those walls have fell.

DM:

Oh, have they? Okay.

TF:

I'm not sure that any of it stands; some of the walls have fell. Hank Smith's family lived in that after he passed away. And some family member was leaving there—the house caught on fire and it burned.

DM:

I see.

TF:

And they never did rebuild it.

DM:

Okay, I know Georgia Mae Ericson rebuilt her house east of there a little ways, still on his land, I guess, but—

TF:

They divided that land, and Georgia Mae didn't get the Hank Smith house. She got the north rim, and she was cremated, and her ashes were scattered and Owl Holler.

DM:

Owl Holler, is it right near there?

TF:

Yes, its north of the house on the lip of the canyon. But she liked owls, she liked owls. She had quite a collection of owls, and I've got one of her owls, that she had. You know, the house she built was kind of a party house. Well, she used it real diplomatically. Politicians would hold fundraisers there and it was really unique. And that house now has been sold to a family and there's a family that lives there. It was left with a museum. The house and the museum and all of that stuff where Georgia Mae passed away, it was left in that conclave. Since then, they have—and this is in the last three or four years—that house sold. It's a family residence. Off the record.

DM:

So your granddaddy came out here in 1916?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay, now how did he meet your grandmother?

TF:

I don't know. They came out here also. They lived in Estacado and they lived east of Estacado.

DM:

Do you know her name, your grandmother and her maiden name?

TF:

Yeah Deannie, Deannie Smith.

DM:

Deannie Smith, how do you spell Deannie?

TF:

D-E-A, I don't know.

DM:

Deannie Smith.

TF:

It's on her tombstone.

DM:

Oh, it is? Okay, at Estacado Cemetery.

TF:

No, she's buried in Lorenzo.

DM:

At Lorenzo, okay.

TF:

Yeah, she's buried out there.

DM:

Okay, she buried your Granddaddy Hooks and then your mom must have been buried down there?

TF:

My mother's buried here.

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DM:

Oh, I'm sorry, she must have been born out there at Estacado.

TF:

Yeah. No, no, she came here as a kid from Arkansas because that can make her cry. They would tease her, that she came from Arkansas barefooted. She came to Texas from Arkansas barefooted because she was a baby (laughs).

DM:

Okay.

TF:

But after she got older, that was a real—it was a real downer to come from Arkansas to here barefooted.

DM:

Even if you were a little baby.

TF:

Well, that doesn't tell that part.

DM:

What was her name, your mom?

TF:

Gladys.

DM:

Gladys Hooks?

TF:

Gladys Irene Hooks. And she had one sister; her sister's name was Nettie May.

DM:

What was it?

TF:

Nettie May.

DM:

Nettie May.

TF:

Nettie May Shaker. She married a Shaker.

DM:

Netty like N-E-T-T-Y or something like that?

TF:

I, E.

DM:

I, E. Okay, Nettie May.

TF:

Now, she's buried out here.

DM:

At Lorenzo?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay, but she grew up—those girls grew up in Estacado? You know, we were looking at the Estacado Cemetery and the Lorenzo Cemetery last week, but it's sounding like a lot of these people that came down in this area after leaving Estacado because of the war there, there's children and now they're buried in Lorenzo. Is that pretty much the migration, that Estacado people came to Lorenzo?

TF:

Everything grew to live in Estacado and go to school in Lorenzo, high school in Lorenzo. You stayed on the road all the time because of the activity of the school. You played basketball two nights and their transportation back—I graduated from here in 1947.

DM:

From here in Lorenzo.

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TF:

In '47, and our transportation wasn't all that great in the thirties and forties.

DM:

Was there a paved road between here and Estacado?

TF:

No, at one time when we rode those horses here, there wasn't a paved road. There was a glider airfield, South Plains Army Air Field, and it had an auxiliary field, and it had a paved runway. Whenever they disposed of that auxiliary field, they plowed up that runway and they paved the road.

DM:

With the old broken-up asphalt?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

I'll be.

TF:

That's how we got paved road.

DM:

I'll be. Where was that air field, that auxiliary airfield from Estacado? What direction and how far?

TF:

It was west, two miles from that cemetery.

DM:

Okay, and what would they do with an auxiliary field? They left South Plains Army Airfield near Lubbock, and they came and flew out here. Were they doing touch-and-gos? Well, they were gliders.

TF:

They were gliders and they kept a bunch of gliders out there and they had some barracks and they had some cooking facilities. It had a fire department there. And they were just training—and you know, you could actually take an old boy and start at Lubbock, pick him up in Lubbock in

the glider, get him up in the air, and he was supposed to fly into Estacado or that auxiliary field. There was another one of those fields over at Brownfield. And then some of those gliders would land, and they'd stay there overnight and the next day they would go back to taking them off.

DM:

Did you ever see that happening? You were probably a teenage kid by that time.

TF:

Yeah, there was some problems associated with being patriotic. Once in a while they would drop one of those ropes and you would find it with a tractor and a plow in the field and that rope would be over a hundred foot long.

DM:

You'd hit it with your plow.

TF:

It was about an inch in diameter and it was nylon, and it was a real struggle to get that out of the field once you found the thing and it was struggle to get it out of the field. You had to get it all moved into one row, and then you'd move it up on top of the tractor and pull it out, and you would then tear up one or two rows doing that.

DM:

Oh boy.

TF:

And that day in time, there wasn't a lot of plentiful money. So you had this nice rope, you had lots of this rope. Some of it they never did come and get. And every farm wanted to have some rope. They made a block and some guy figured out he would make his block and take and it pull the well with, out of this nylon rope. And it just stretches—they never could pull a foot.

DM:

It was elastic because it was a tow rope. Yeah.

TF:

It was not hard, it stretched.

DM:

Oh no. Did you ever see them flying over and releasing all of that? You got to watch that.

TF:

Oh yeah. And the fall of the year, we knew where the watermelon patches was and we'd done our share of the war effort. We would go load up a pick up load of watermelons and pull up to the fence over there and they knew after the first trip when they send us.

DM:

They'd run out to the fence?

TF:

They would come to the fence. And we'd pitch watermelons over the fence to them.

DM:

Pretty good. Were there any mishaps out there?

TF:

Yeah, and you could tell when there was a mishap. If somebody got killed, they'd put everything in there and the air just got filled with gliders and airplanes even though they would have an accident.

DM:

Because that was their way of honoring the person that had died?

TF:

That was more or less to keep their courage.

DM:

I see.

TF:

"Don't let this set down in here. Let's put you in there." Now, the gliders—and these are all new pilots. They're landing everywhere. You had them in roads, you had them in fields, you had them everywhere.

DM:

Did you ever have to get the tractor and pull them out?

TF:

No, they were disassembled. They would take the wings off of them—and they had a trailer with a fuselage—and disassemble them and get them out of there. You know, I know, I don't remember anybody getting paid any damages. I mean, it was just part of the war effort.

DM:

Well, that was kind of exciting times for Lorenzo and Estacado then.

TF:

Well, for Estacado, you know, they'd practice taking one glider off at a time, taking one glider and then sometimes they took two at a time. So it was always a fascination to me to watch.

DM:

Was there anything left out there that indicates the location?

TF:

The last time I was there, there was an old fire station there. The old fire station was there and the headquarter office. There was an old kid named McCullough that was doing bunch of work on glider, on air front, on air force spaces.

DM:

John McCullough.

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

As far as you know, were the only auxiliary fields for South Plains Army Airfield, the one out here near Estacado and the one near Brownville?

TF:

That's all I remember.

DM:

Yeah.

TF:

There was one around Brownsville.

DM:

That's interesting.

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TF:

The army bought a section of land and put the runways on that. And never did fix a hard surface road, it was just a dirt road. I guess, I never paid that much attention, but I guess when it really rained and got muddy everything was at a standstill.

DM:

Do you know if they contracted any people around Lorenzo or Estacado to help build up everything out there?

TF:

No, now this lake, if you're talking about that, this lake right just right outside of town—

DM:

Out toward—

TF:

Going toward Lubbock.

DM:

Toward Lubbock, about a mile out there.

TF:

That's called Shirley Lake.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

The reason it's called Shirley Lake where the black cemetery is, to the north of it, there were some houses and the first house there was a family named Shirley. When that road came in, it was a money making project, because it came in when teams were still the work horse. So they took fresnos and teams and built that road up.

DM:

They got people here local to do that.

TF:

Yeah, people. They brought their teams and they came and they worked it. They built that road out with fresnos and teams.

DM:

Did you ever hear how they were paid?

TF:

Not much.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

Now, there was two boys here in town, they're both dead now, named Darden, both of them worked on it and they really got rich. It paid good money.

DM:

Okay, Darden.

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay, how do you spell Darden?

TF:

D-A-R-D-E-N. But you know, sitting around drinking coffee, or what-have-you, and they were talking about having to build that road.

DM:

Was the road built before the railroad or the railroad first?

TF:

The railroad first, the railroad came at about 1910.

DM:

Okay, this road would have been when?

TF:

After 1910. And I don't know where, I may have burned it. I had a copy of the railroad and y'all ought to have one. There are a bunch of those down there. But this street over here is 6th Street and one time I owned 6th Street. On railroad property, Kerr-McGee Chemical Company came in and built a big fertilizer barn down there. And they eventually wanted to sell it, and I bought it,

and I never realized that until I got to looking at the deeds, but I bought the road.

DM:

Well, I hope you put up a toll booth.

TF:

Like an idiot, I was the mayor I think; like an idiot, I gave it to the city, but I owned 6th Street about a block, a little over a block.

DM:

That's funny, a city street, pretty good.

TF:

I had a copy of that railroad, running right through here and I had accumulated a pile of paper. I was in the building across the alley over here. As I started—when I moved out and moving all that paper, it was old enough I could burn it. I guess I burned that forever. I'm not sure.

DM:

Well, let's go up to Estacado for a little bit. We were looking at it the other day. You showed me where the school sight was. Do you know when that school was built up there? The one right in town, it must have been from first grade on up.

TF:

I can't tell you. I can look back, I can find it. The first old school weren't much of a school. The Quaker schools were church buildings and that sort of thin. The school my mother went to was a three-story building.

DM:

Okay, that was the wooden three-story building you mentioned earlier?

TF:

I've got it; I've got copies somewhere.

DM:

Do you remember hearing anything about that? How many teachers or how many, what grades it covered and that kind of thing. Is that the one that had the teacherage with it?

TF:

No.

DM:
Okay.

TF:
The brick one, whenever they built the brick one, across the street from the school they had a teacherage. The superintendent got to live at the teacherage.

DM:
The superintendent got to, okay. Now, this brick school, do you know when it was built, roughly?

TF:
No, I don't. I can probably look all that up.

DM:
Was it a multistory?

TF:
No, it was a single story.

DM:
Okay, now do you know what grades were in it?

TF:
Yeah, when I first started school there in about 1939, there was two grades to the classroom. First and second was in one room.

DM:
With one teacher?

TF:
Yeah.

DM:
Okay.

TF:
And that school had, at that time, had coal-fired stoves. The stoves were coal-fired. And on the north end of the school there was a basement, and outside of the building, there was a wooden box container with a lid on it, and they brought a coal in there by the truckload, and they would

back up to this box, and the coal would go in the basement. And we would, as kids, we would keep the fires going in the winter time. We had a janitor that would start the fires, and then drive the school bus.

DM:

One school bus?

TF:

Two.

DM:

Two school buses, okay.

TF:

Two school buses. Anyhow, this guy would make the fires, and then we kept them—and typical kids, we had some tricks of our own. You know, if you got tired sitting in the classroom, you'd take a scuttle of coal and a low fire. You could throw all of that coal in at one, time and it would kid smother that fire. Then they had big, long pry bars² that you stirred the clinkers³ with. You could stir that, and the smoke would just boil, and you could empty a school house with tons of smoke, and had the maddest teachers (laughs).

DM:

Well, in the winter did it heat it pretty good?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Did it?

TF:

The big old stoves had a shroud around it. Then there was a shroud that kept from you from getting on the stove. But we kind of took care of them. Things were pretty loose in those days. When I went to high school down here—

DM:

In Lorenzo.

TF:

² Similar to a crowbar.

³ Stony residue from burned coal or from a furnace.

—You'd never guess how I made my spending money. I drove a school bus.

DM:

And you were in high school? But you were living up at Estacado, is that right?

TF:

We lived in Estacado. There were still two school buses. Each driver got up and made the rounds and gathered up all the kids, and all the grade school kids got off and went into Estacado. The kids from the other bus come down on my bus, it was high school kids. And we came down through the country here, and stopped down here, and picked up a Lorenzo girl and brought her to school.

DM:

And you were the bus driver?

TF:

I was the bus driver.

DM:

And you were a high school student?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

That is funny.

TF:

We went to classes that afternoon, and I went back to Estacado, and picked up my grade school people. That's how I made my spending money.

DM:

Ain't that something? Now what grades were at Estacado and what grades would you leave Estacado and start going to Lorenzo?

TF:

Freshman.

DM:

Freshman, like ninth grade maybe?

TF:
Something like that.

DM:
Okay. Do you remember any of your teachers out at Estacado?

TF:
Huh?

DM:
Do you remember any of your teacher's names out at Estacado?

TF:
Oh yeah, I can think of a bunch of them. Most of them are dead. I'm eighty-six, so.

DM:
Throw some names out there that may interest.

TF:
Okay, there was a S. Harry Kelsey.

DM:
S. Harry Kelsey.

TF:
And his wife's name was Donna Lou, and she was a school teacher. I'm just going to have to sit down and think about it. We had very few teachers that came in there and just taught school. Most of the people lived there, they had family there and they lived there.

DM:
Okay. Oh, one thing you said that I need to get you to clarify. You said that to get the coal, the truck would back up and dump it into a box, but it went into a basement. Was it a chute that led to the basement?

TF:
No, it was just a hole in the wall.

DM:
I see.

TF:

It backed up, and then you had to be—after so much got in, you had to get in there and push it around, but all of that was kept in the basement.

DM:

Okay, so there was a door opening that you could open, or something that you could open.

TF:

A flap-type door.

DM:

A flap that came up.

TF:

This box was like three foot wide.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

It may have been six or eight—it was eight foot wide, I guess.

DM:

And the box was down in the basement?

TF:

No, the box was sitting on the ground next to the building. So it went into that and went under the wall and into the basement.

DM:

Okay, so it went through the box and down into the basement.

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Huh, golly. The basement, you can still see the basement.

TF:

The basement is still there.

DM:
Okay.

TF:
We needed to wait till winter to wander out there.

DM:
Now this school was pretty close to the old Hank Smith well, wasn't it?

TF:
No.

DM:
Okay, how far was it?

TF:
I can actually show you, I don't know. It wasn't all that far, I guess.

DM:
There was also a courthouse there. Could you tell me the story of the courthouse?

TF:
Well, the courthouse was next to the square, and the wood was freighted in here for that courthouse. It was the first courthouse for Crosby County. It was the Crosby Country Courthouse. It was the first courthouse for Crosby County.

DM:
Where was it freighted from? Where would you get wood from back then?

TF:
They freighted a lot of it from Colorado City. It came in here, they built that courthouse and it was a two-story courthouse. Now Crosby County, the first Crosby County started at the New Mexico line and it went to Baylor County, which is single. When they came back with the Hart survey, that was ten counties in there. And the courthouse, Crosby County Courthouse, was in Lubbock County, about a hundred yards. The Hart survey. So then, they took this courthouse down and moved it to Old Emma.

DM:
Old Emma, yeah.

TF:

They put it back together and Crosbyton's Courthouse was at Old Emma then. Over a period of time it stayed at Old Emma, and Crosbyton—as they put it—stole the Old Emma Courthouse and moved it.

DM:

Most counties have a story like that it seems like, but this is a great story about the Crosby County Courthouse being in Lubbock County.

TF:

It was in Lubbock County whenever—it's like me, I'm born in Crosby County, but the water came from Lubbock County. And you can see it when we get up there, I'll show you, but you can see, you can see the difference in it.

DM:

The difference in the line, the county line or what?

TF:

Well, the line is not on the road, you're expecting county lines to be on roads, but this is not on the county line. Now I used to farm, I used to be a big farmer. I farmed in four counties and with three different congressmen on this one farm. There's a farm up north of town here, we call it "Four Corners," the four counties come together on that farm. There's two hundred acres in the damn thing.

DM:

Makes it sound like you own four counties.

TF:

I've testified it before committees how big a farmer I was, that I farmed in four counties. I'd eventually tell the rest of the story. The county lines didn't follow the roads, the roads didn't follow the county lines.

DM:

Okay, well now tell me about your father's store. Didn't you say he had a store up there?

TF:

Yeah, he had more like what you would call a "mercantile."

DM:

Now, what was his name?

TF:

T.T.

DM:

T.T.?

TF:

Tom.

DM:

Tom T. Fondren, okay.

TF:

The store—well, my dad—there had been stores there at all times. Hume and Stringfeller back in the Quaker days, they had a big store there and they had men's stores. And this old store building was closed up. Somebody had went to the timber country and where they started selling timber, the bark, the first cut would be bark. And so the front of the store building looked like a log cabin. They had looked like they had took that and put it on the front of that store. You know, we had gas; we had coal, hog feed, cow feed, groceries. We were there during the war.

DM:

Oh, so you probably worked in the store, too, then, is that right?

TF:

Well, we lived in the back of it. I took a bath in front of half of that community. 'Cause you know, there's just a door here and the kitchen, and that was back in the days of the number three wash tub. If anybody come in the store and there wasn't somebody up at the front, hell, they'd just come in the kitchen.

DM:

There you were.

TF:

I'd be taking a bath (laughs). We were in that store a good long time. It was a good business. Back then, they bought a lot of products by the case. If these green beans looked real good or something, hell, they'd buy a case. The word spread around. During the war, we didn't have any delivery service, so we had to haul most of the stuff. We had an old pickup and we hauled it. We'd go to Lubbock and buy products from the store.

DM:

Now people, were they using—when did electricity come up there?

TF:

Electricity came in there about 1939, 1940.

DM:

So you had electricity at the store.

TF:

Yeah, we when we moved there we had electricity.

DM:

Were there any people there that were still depending on kerosene for lighting?

TF:

Well, when we first moved back here in 1939, it was all coal, there wasn't no electricity. You remember back in those days in the summer time, an ice man would come by and you would put a sign up at the window of the house, whether you wanted twenty-five pounds, fifty pounds or what. When we got electricity, that was a fantastic thing because you could have ice cream anytime.

DM:

And that's important.

TF:

But the ice cream, we finally learned how to make it. The first ice cream they made in those old ice boxes. It was icy, but they finally learned they could take this Eagle Brand condensed milk and make ice cream and it wasn't iced up. You know, you can have iced tea in the winter time, a lot of things. You didn't buy ice in all the seasons. The truck delivered.

DM:

Life got real good, it sounds like.

TF:

Yeah, and there wasn't light fixtures on the first old houses. They put it in the middle of the room and they dropped cord down and it was a bulb hanging on the cord.

DM:

Were most of the houses double walled back then? Did they have an interior wall?

TF:

Some of them, most of them were double walled, but now, some were single wall, but then they put a cheese cloth on the wall on the inside and then papered it and it made it fairly warm. Now getting back to the Quakers, the first stone hotel that had been in Estacado, they put two-by-fours in the wall and the frame on the wall. They boarded both sides and filled the inside with dirt, insulation, they insulated against cold weather. They insulated with duct tape.

DM:

That's interesting.

TF:

They insulated with dirt.

DM:

Was there a name for that hotel? Was there a particular name for that hotel?

TF:

Yeah, and I can't tell you off the top of my head. I can hunt all of this stuff up. Fellow by the name Hunt Wright. The Hunts, there was a Doctor Hunt; they were a pretty predominant family. One of those guys went on that was the president of the college down there.

DM:

How did they heat back then? Now, I know that you mentioned that they started out using some buffalo chips when they first came out here, but they were using coal? Was coal shipped in?

TF:

Eventually they went to coal.

DM:

I know the school did, but residents also and businesses?

TF:

Coal, you could either buy it in a tow sack or you could pick up load or a truck load, you know. In every house for a long time, you would buy the coal and dunk it in a pile out by the house. So the coal was there.

DM:

By the way, this coal, could you put a match to it and get it going or did you have to use some kind of fire starter?

TF:

No, when I was at school and when we lived on the farm, you had to have—part of my chores after school was, you got what we call kindling, you would break up some old wood, you would have a little old wood broke up, you would have a container that you had coal all on in it and you had coal. You had that all in close to the stove. And in the morning when Dad got up, he put the kindling in, put the coal on top of it, put a little of that coal in there and lit it. By the time I got up it was nice. You could get right by the stove and press.

DM:

Now we know why they call it coal oil.

TF:

Huh?

DM:

And now we know why they call kerosene coal oil.

TF:

Well, it was called coal oil, but it was kerosene, and the lamps all burned kerosene.

DM:

So yawl probably sold a lot of kerosene at your store. Did you sell coal there also?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

And then groceries, feed, and how about clothes? Did you sell any clothes?

TF:

Gloves and that sort of thing.

DM:

Glove, yeah. Tools?

TF:

Huh?

DM:

Did you sell tools, any kind of tools?

TF:

No.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

But we fixed flats, we bought eggs. We never did buy cream, but we bought eggs.

DM:

Okay, bought and sold eggs. Now what about fuel, gasoline?

TF:

We had gasoline, two pumps. They were these old hand pumps. We bought from Wiley in Petersburg. We bought gasoline from Wiley, and he brought it down there in a truck, and he had a five gallon can, and it hung on the back of the truck under the spout. He would turn it on and when that can filled it up he would turn it off. And when he opened the door, there was a little marker; one, two, three, four, five, six. He moved this little hand, and he'd take that can and he had a funnel going in the underground tank, and he'd pour that can in there. But he kept track of it on here.

DM:

Uh-huh. How many times did he have to do that to fill your tank?

TF:

It was five gallons and maybe those things were three or four hundred gallons.

DM:

Golly, that was a lot of work to fill a tank, wasn't it?

TF:

Old man Wiley, there's a bunch of Wileys. And now Wiley's in Lubbock, the boy, the grandkid and great grandkid of the old man I knew, he's got the International Harvester Company, and Wiley Manufacturing in Petersburg.

DM:

That's a pretty big concern now, I guess. You see the name around a lot.

TF:

They worked a lot of people in Petersburg. You take a lot of these out of Petersburg and that would really be hurting.

DM:

So, did you as a kid, did you spend more time working at the store or working on the farm? How did you spend your spare time?

TF:

Well, somebody had to be at the store at all times. If my mother was doing something and my dad was doing something then I had to stay at the store. And nobody really wanted to stay at the store.

DM:

Nobody wanted to stay there.

TF:

You never wanted to stay at the store. And the store, in wet weather or cold weather when farmers couldn't work, they would come and eat candy and drink Cokes and talk.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

And then get bored. Back in those days they had peanuts that come in little brown box about that tall. Some of it had nickels, some of it had dimes, and some had quarters. There was a big deal to drink a Coke or an RC Cola or a Pepsi Cola or something and eat one of those peanuts to see if you got any money out of it.

DM:

What do you mean money out of it?

TF:

Well—

DM:

Oh, it had the dime or the nickel in the box.

TF:

Right, and not every box had one. And a twenty-four count frog leg had six or seven money in it. But you know, some people would roll those on the counter to see if it rolled there first.

DM:

See if they could get a coin in there?

TF:

There was an old man that was the book keeper at the store in the fall of the year. Every afternoon he would walk up to the store and get a Coke, and he had a certain way he'd roll that thing, and he was really good at getting money. He was an old bachelor and he was real good at getting money.

DM:

I've never heard of this, is it a little brown box?

TF:

No, they were colored up. The little box of peanuts would be about that big around.

DM:

Three inches tall?

TF:

Yeah and round.

DM:

And round, okay.

TF:

And it had parched peanuts in it. And they were good peanuts. They cost a nickel.

DM:

You don't remember the brand name?

TF:

No.

DM:

Apparently I have just never heard of them. And you might win money?

TF:

You might get a quarter, you might get a nickel, you might get a dime.

DM:

Well interesting. Well, did you work on the farm any?

TF:

Yeah, we farmed, but eventually we farmed a mile south of Petersburg. But we farmed. My dad had a story that he always—one year we got hailed out, around two or three times we got hailed out. At Plainview they had a big hail and we planted black eyed peas on the hailed out crops.

DM:

Oh.

TF:

And then when they got big enough to eat, we started harvesting like you'd pull cotton, you would pull black eyed peas. We'd take trailer loads of black eyed peas to Plainview, Dorman's Cannery.

DM:

Dorman's Cannery, okay.

TF:

The salesman at that time had got to where they were salesman that would call in at the store, and they drove delivery trucks. The salesman, they all were talkers. My dad would say, "Well, go over to the farm and get you some black eyed peas." Then I'd get over there and they'd send that damn trailer load back out of peas and they got them.

DM:

They what?

TF:

They wouldn't go pick their peas; they'd just get them out of the trailer (laughs). My dad was fumed.

DM:

Oh, I'll bet. When you took them up to Dorman's Cannery did you have to shell them first?

TF:

They had shellers.

DM:

Okay, that's something. Well, that's a good alternative crop then. I worked out okay?

TF:

Yeah, it was okay.

DM:

What kind of crop was hailed out, was it cotton?

TF:

Cotton.

DM:

Okay, is that typically what y'all loaded?

TF:

We grew a lot of grain sorghum,. Back in those days it was about half grain sorghum. You wanted to go to Estacado?

DM:

I was just mentioning that later on—when everything freezes over and all of those weeds are gone and knocked down; maybe we could run up there and note some things? I also need to mark where your granddaddy's place was and things like that, you know? I think that's interesting. Now, how did your daddy get out here, Tom Fondren? How did he—

TF:

Well, my father's [family]—the Fondrens—came from Erath county to Lamesa county, made a crop or two down in Lamesa. There came one hellacious sandstorm that blew the chickens away. My grandfather said he had no place to keep chickens.

DM:

Now about what year are we talking about?

TF:

Oh, I don't know. I don't have it. Anyhow, him and my dad, my grandfather and my dad, came to Lubbock and this real estate agent had a stage coach. They were—I guess they had Davidson, I don't know. But they got on a stage coach and they'd make a round of this country on the stage coach. My grandfather liked this place so he bought it. And then they started to move and the moving was kind of a problem. They moved in the winter time. My dad and another guy were bringing the livestock. My grandfather and the other kids, they brought the vehicles and the

clothes, and furniture. My dad and the other man was bringing the livestock. They got in the canyon. Do you know where the Slaton airport is? They got in that canyon and a blue northern was coming.

DM:

Oh boy.

TF:

And there was some old man that was just the way off the road. They camped out with him for the night and were sleeping in the wagons. This old man came down and told them, "You boys better come to the house because you can't winter here in the night. It's just going to be too cold." So they went to the house and spent the night there and then came home the next day.

DM:

So they just came across country with their—you said they were hauling livestock. They weren't walking livestock; they were bringing it in transports?

TF:

Yeah, they were driving it. You know, cattle crosses.

DM:

What was your granddaddy's name, your father's father?

TF:

John.

DM:

John.

TF:

John T.

DM:

John T. Fondren. Do you remember what your grandmother's name was?

TF:

Yeah, let me think about this a minute. Della.

DM:

Della.

TF:

She was a Fincher.

DM:

What?

TF:

Her name before she married grandpa was Fincher.

DM:

Fincher.

TF:

The Finchers were in Erath County.

DM:

Okay, so that's how your parents got together, all the grandparents ended up here in Estacado.

TF:

Yeah, they were within a hundred yards of each other.

DM:

Oh really?

TF:

Yeah, my Grandpa Hudson lived here in Hale and my Grandpa Fondren lived just down the road.

DM:

Do you remember when you started going to high school here at Lorenzo?

TF:

Well, I graduated in '47, so '47, '46, '45.

DM:

Okay, so right around the end of World War II is when you started coming to school here. When did you—did your families eventually move down here or did they live the rest of their lives up at Estacado?

TF:

No, when I went in the service, I went in in 1950, but when I went in, they ran that store for another year or so and built a house out on the farm, about three-seventy acres. They built the house out there, sold the store, and moved and retired, but he retired farming. He was just farming in quarters after he retired.

DM:

He retired from farming?

TF:

No, retired from the store.

DM:

Store, but he kept farming? I see, okay.

TF:

But he was working.

DM:

I see.

TF:

This all happened within 1950 and 1955.

DM:

What happened to Estacado? It was a pretty thriving community at one time. How many Quakers lived there, for example?

TF:

Well, the Quakers actually, in the 1900's we had a drought just like we've been through in the 1900's and their crops weren't good. This country all east of us had become a real cattle country and it had lots of cowboys and lots of cattle. The cowboys was coming to Estacado and marrying those pretty Quaker girls. That didn't set with the Quakers too well and the drought coupled with it. They decided to leave here and went to Friendswood down on the coast. They hadn't been there long until Galveston blew away.

DM:

Golly.

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TF:

But anyhow, they moved, the big end of them moved there. Some of them went to Lubbock, but most of them left Estacado, Quaker time was over. Those in Friendswood got into the fig business. They grew figs and then they processed figs and they done quite well from what I've read. In the fig business, Friendswood.

DM:

Golly, isn't that something?

TF:

And they scattered. One of those Quakers that was here a president of Baylor at one time. A Hunt. Of the Hunts, there's a boy in Lubbock named Hunt, and I've got his name and phone number and I'm going to visit him sometime. The reason I know about him, do you know Westbrook?

DM:

Ray Westbrook?

TF:

Yeah, he knows as much about this crap as everybody because he wrote all of it. Ray had a pretty good friend. If he wants something to write about he comes out here and we put it together.

DM:

The Quakers left because of the drought and the cowboys around 1900, but then the community just slowly declined so there's how many people living up there now?

TF:

Five or six, seven or eight.

DM:

What caused the rest of the people to leave over the years?

TF:

Well, I think you're seeing that today at Lorenzo. The metropolitan complex like Lubbock and good transportation. These merchants can't compete with the big box stores. Petersburg is an example, that's about Lorenzo in size and doesn't have a grocery store. No grocery stores. This grocery store has changed names and I think that's the predecessor to it closing. It's called Food Jet now. And I looked, and it closed, eventually. When I was a kid, you'd come to town on Saturday night and there was a theater here. And you went to the theater. I was filthy rich, I got

nine cents—I got a whole dime when I came to town on Saturday night. It cost nine cents to go to the picture show and I had a penny to just blow.

DM:

But it was a happening place anyhow, Lorenzo.

TF:

But everybody came to town on Saturday night and they bought groceries and traded their cream and eggs. There was a family that lived—about every hundred sixty acres, there was a family that had kids.

DM:

Down in the country?

TF:

Yeah, and now the farm population picked up a whole lot of Spanish-Americans and acquired a bunch of them. I had a friend that was raised here south of town and when he retired he was farming what seven families had farmed when he was a kid. They farmed the land, he didn't own the land, but he farmed the land he was raised on. He replaced seven families. And that's happened all over.

DM:

Well, and it usually goes down. It's like Robertson, south of here and is scattered every seven or eight miles or so, even or eight miles.

TF:

Well, back in the old days now Emma was picked as the county seat because it was the center of the county. They tried to put the courthouses in the center of the county. And then they tried to put the schools about seven or eight miles apart. And now with transportation like we have, it's shrinking population, this won't support them.

DM:

Can you think back to the time when you noticed that Lorenzo was on the downhill slide? When do you think that might have happened? Did it kind of hit there, maybe leveled out and started back down? Lose some population lose some businesses? When was that?

TF:

Oh, I don't know. I came back here in 1955 out of the Air Force and then lived about one year out in the country, I was single. And I built the house here in Lorenzo. I built a house to bach in. I built a little house. At about 1955, this was a pretty thriving little town, but now, in the last

census of city of Lorenzo they had eleven hundred and forty- seven people. Three hundred and eight-eight of them were white, sixty-three were black, six were Indians, six hundred and seventy-seven was Latino, thirteen mixed. I'd never seen them put "mixed" before and I've been keeping these numbers for a long time, but this year the census put thirteen mixed. And I've been keeping these numbers for a long time.

DM:

I think you had mentioned that there was a larger Black population here at one time, is that right?

TF:

Right.

DM:

What had brought them in? Was it farm labor?

TF:

They worked and they worked in houses, cleaned houses, and stuff like that.

DM:

Had they gone to Lubbock mostly, or?

TF:

Well, they died out. Part of it died out and the kids wasn't finding the kind of jobs they wanted so they drifted off.

DM:

Right, because you were showing me last week, you were showing me a whole area over here on the west side of town where the Black community lived and it was pretty empty. Black houses had been moved or demolished and all. It looked pretty wide open.

TF:

And they had a Black school and they had a church building and a school building all in the same building.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

We had gone away from that because the kids had gone to better jobs. They get a better education, they go to better jobs. And the ones that stayed here are older people and they're dying off.

DM:

What about the Mexican-Americans? Did they come in as migrant laborers first, or do you know when they began to arrive or were they always here as far as you remember?

TF:

Well, when we ran that store, when my folks ran that store at Estacado, that's when the truckloads came out of the valley. They'd have a truck load of people and they'd come help out, out there. I remember, I can't tell you what year, but I remember the first Spanish family that overwintered at Estacado.

DM:

Oh really, huh?

TF:

And they were a real nice family, they came here and as we sat in a truck, they decided to stay and work for this farmer.

DM:

I see.

TF:

And the boys come to school, when we went to school, they came from school. But the girls weren't sent to school. All they were going to do was cook, clean house, and have babies. They got to be a real rhubarb about making the girls go to school because the school boards, not the Estacado school board, but the board above them, said "You've got to teach those girls." So they were in a hell of a rhubarb about getting those girls. They were the first family that came here, went to school, and became part of the community.

DM:

And what were their names, their family name? Can you guess at what decade that was, or how old you were at the time?

TF:

Oh, I was probably in high school.

DM:

Now tell me about these migrant facilities?

TF:

We had here a migrant labor camp.

DM:

Here in Lorenzo?

TF:

That's right. We had a migrant labor and it was specifically for farm workers. It got to where—but they come in here for gin jobs and harvesting and what-have-you, and they hoed in the summer time. We had a lot of people that came in here. There was about sixty-three units. Eventually, we mechanized farming where that type of labor wasn't needed. A couple or three years ago we spend a million-and-a-quarter grant on that migrant housing project down there and made it into apartments. But the apartments leaned to agriculture. To live in those apartments you had to have some sort of agriculture occupation.

DM:

I see, how many—

TF:

Those are all adjusted rent.

DM:

Okay, so how many units are there now?

TF:

Forty-something. Forty-one, forty-two.

DM:

What kind of grant? Was it a federal grant?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

And then what about the original migrant camp? Who paid for all that? Was it a government thing?

TF:

It was government money.

DM:

It was federal?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay. Now it's called something else—"Cottonwoods," or?

TF:

Cottonwood, but now we've got several.

DM:

We saw some scattered about a little bit, it seems like.

TF:

Cottonwood Square Apartments.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

And there's three different units of Cottonwood Square Apartments.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

The one on the west end of town caters to a degree on elderly. The one across from the school and the one, the large one, caters to anyone. You have to have an agriculture connection, somehow.

DM:

Forty-some odd units, that's a pretty good chunk of Lorenzo right there.

TF:

This is part of the reason Lorenzo is sinking. It's the reason why all these little towns are having problems. We're attracting the low-income type of people. A low-income is not a type of person, a low-income group of people that live in adjusted living quarters. And usually they don't return much work. So consequently you build up an influence of non-productive people. They don't spend as much money down on Main Street.

DM:

There's an interesting difference, just at first glance, I really don't know much about it, but there seems to be an interesting difference between Lorenzo and Idalou, but Idalou looks like a sleeper community of people who work in Lubbock.

TF:

Bedroom.

DM:

Bedroom community, yeah. It's mostly people working in Lubbock.

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

A very different kind of community than Lorenzo is, but I suspect at one time they were very similar types of communities.

TF:

We are a bedroom community to a degree.

DM:

Well, here I am. I live out near here.

TF:

We are a bedroom community to a degree, but then we've had a lot of giveaway homes. We actually through a government program, acquired a bunch of brand-new little houses that the people have been living in and getting by. And that is a more adjusted income and it's a bigger influx of people that require an adjusted income. And those people don't have a lot of money to spend, so they don't contribute a lot to the school or the churches, or that sort of thing.

DM:

You were in the military during the Korean War. You were in the Air Force, you mentioned. Were you gone during the time of that drought of the early fifties?

TF:

Do what?

DM:

Were you gone from here during the drought of the early fifties?

TF:

I wasn't here.

DM:

Okay. Well, did it have a negative impact on this area or was it just a kind of temporary deal?

TF:

No, it has a negative impact. You know, I was going with a girl in Lubbock that worked at the draft board, and we went somewhere one night and she said, "Well, if you're going to volunteer like you keep talking, you better get going because your name's been pulled."

DM:

Whoa, so you volunteered.

TF:

So I went and joined the Air Force. I didn't want to be in that walking army; I didn't want to be in that.

DM:

Where did you do your basics?

TF:

Huh?

DM:

Where did you do your basics?

TF:

I went to San Antonio.

DM:

Kelly Field?

TF:

Yeah, I got stuck in the damn tent. There was a big influx. And it was a cold winter. It was 1950 and it was a cold winter, we slept in a tent and we had two blankets and a folding cot. We learned that if we put paper between the cot and the blanket, it'd cut off part of that cold air. So there was rationed facilities they had which got all the damn newspapers and magazines (laughs). Being in the service was a rude awakening on an old country boy. Because, you know, they taught you and they didn't tell time like we did. They didn't do a damn thing like we did. Everything had—you know, they scared you to death and they'd throw you in jail if you didn't do so and so and so and so. So if you screwed up you went to jail or the brig. You know, fourteen hundred hours, thirteen hundred hours, a while after is just pure Greek.

DM:

Military time.

TF:

I was used to good food and the food was okay, but I was a finicky eater and I ate a lot. They had good fresh bread. That bread was fresh and it was good bread, light bread. And peanut butter would sit on the table, a gallon container; I ate a lot of peanut butter and bread.

DM:

You got through the Air Force.

TF:

Until I finally decided, "Damn, I'm going to have to eat this. I signed up for four years." I lived well enough to eat now. You know, now I don't like meatloaf today. You can turn me upside down and trying to feed me meatloaf. That was the service. They sent me and another old boy one time to Tripoli.

DM:

What? They sent you to Tripoli?

TF:

We were in England and they sent me and him to Tripoli. The airplane that we were on just kind of let us out and we walked out to the base. We'd been in England awhile and they don't eat very well over there. We hadn't been eating civilian food. We went by this chow hall and it smelled good and we decided we'd look—and in the kitchen they had tables set up with pans of roasted turkey.

DM:
Turkey?

TF:
Turkey, roasted turkey. I went around to the front and talked to the people and got their attention and, they old boys, they got us a turkey, when he was saying they got us a turkey from that chow hall. We went down on meadow ring and had a little pocket knife. No bread, no salt, but we ate damn near all that turkey.

DM:
A one course meal, huh?

TF:
Sat there and ate that damn turkey.

DM:
Where all were you stationed?

TF:
Oh, I wondered around all over the world, but I was stationed primarily at March Field in California.

DM:
March Field in California?

TF:
Yeah.

DM:
But you went to England, you went to Tripoli.

TF:
Yeah, we went on—I was in an investigating unit.

DM:
Okay.

TF:
Wherever they were having problems.

DM:
Okay.

TF:
You know, sometimes we wore civilian clothes and sometimes we wore uniforms. That was a pretty exciting mission. My partner was from Tennessee and he was about as country as I was. We drew an assignment in England. In March Field we always went military hawk. March Field had some airplanes flown into England so we was going to ride with them. We went out, took our bags, put them on this damn airplane and they told us it was going to be a while before we'd take off. So we went up and got some coffee. We come back without an airplane. So that's okay, they had other airplanes going. We got another airplane and they took off. Twelve hours later we landed in Saint John's, Newfoundland. The pilot of that plane, it was a little KC-97 tanker that had gas tanks in it. We just packed some blankets next to and on top of one of those blankets. We lay back there and slept and what-have-you. Anyhow, they woke us up and told us to come up to the cockpit. We sat on the floor because the runway had ice on it. And I mean, it had ice on it and it wasn't just make believe. I'd say it was about three or four foot thick.

DM:
Oh my.

TF:
There was a young pilot and an old pilot. And this old pilot was a second lieutenant that had been in the service forever, so you figured he was a fuck-up. And this young buck—and they were arguing, and me and Sid are sitting there on the floor back up against them and they were arguing how they was going to land that damn airplane. I was getting pretty antsy because they'd give us wet suits and if it weren't in the water we were going to land like thirty minutes or something and it's cold. But we went in and they're arguing how to land that damn airplane. The wheels couldn't have been ten foot off the ground when that old pilot said, "We're going to do so and so and so and so." And he melted that thing on that runway.

DM:
Golly. You had to sweat that though. That was at St. John's, Newfoundland?

TF:
Huh?

DM:
That was at St. John's, Newfoundland you said?

TF:

Yeah. It come a hellacious blizzard while we were waiting to refuel and get on. We stayed there ten days.

DM:

Oh boy. Well, I'm always intrigued by you guys who grew up somewhere like Estacado and all of a sudden you saw the world, just by being in the military. That's interesting. Was that pretty amazing to you? Had you ever been?

TF:

Yeah, you got into, you know, blind luck takes care of idiots. We were so dumb that most of the time—the first outfit I was in was Brooklyn National Guard that had been activated.

DM:

Really?

TF:

And they were "youse guys" and lackadaisical.

DM:

Spoke a little different from you, I bet.

TF:

Yeah, but in that group, they, "Man, this boy's from Tennessee and this boy's from Kentucky and one from Arkansas." And we were such if we could team up together so the Yankees didn't run over us, we hold our own. It was okay, they were a good outfit. And it was the best thing that ever happened to us because when we made grade like you wouldn't believe. They were all screw ups. They just didn't give a rat's ass.

DM:

So the four of you excelled?

TF:

Yeah, we turned out to be pretty sharp characters, but we got into all kind of mess. We stayed there at St. John's and when we left St. John's we were supposed to land at Mildenhall, England and we landed in Crestwood, Scotland, because the weather was bad in Mildenhall and we couldn't and we couldn't get on the plane. We rode a bus from Crestwood down to Mildenhall. The damn airplane, if we caught the ride to get to Crestwood, he just stopped out on the runway, opened the doors, and let the men send off. They took on off and went to Germany. And you talk about alone somewhere, we're sitting out in the middle of Crestwood, Scotland's airport, and

they told us that they're coming to pick you up, but hell, you didn't know how in the world they was going to find you in foggy, you couldn't see nowhere and colder than anything. And sure enough, they came and got us.

DM:

What an experience though.

TF:

We get into their base operations and we've got parkas on and we pull down and it was warm in there and we pulled our parkas off and when we did, Sid unbuttoned his damn coat and his damn .38 showed and then the next thing we knew, we're slammed against the wall and they're frisking us because we've got weapons on us. They were going to take our weapons and we wasn't about to leave them and it took half the night with them and talking back and forth to America, about who we were and what.

DM:

Well, you were in uniform, weren't you?

TF:

Yeah, but nobody cared. The bobbies don't carry a weapon on them, nobody carries a weapon.

DM:

They don't want you to do it.

TF:

And we didn't want to wait because we'd never paid for the damn things, we never paid for them. So we finally worked it out where we could take them. They took us down to this bus station and put us on the bus. And the main time they had changed their currency, we went from dollars to pounds. Everything we started to buy we'd just hold a handful of money out and they took all of it.

DM:

A little bit of culture shock there.

TF:

Education, higher education.

DM:

Oh boy.

TF:

We get on this bus and Sid, an old lanky boy from Tennessee and he asked the bus driver, "You got a heater on this bus?" "Yeah Hank, we've got a heater, go ahead, sit down." They brought blankets for each two seats, that was the heater. Do you know, like a Mennonite or something, we've been eating K-rations on the damn airplane and hadn't had nothing else to eat. So we started raising plenty of hell with this bus driver. "We need something to eat." "Okay." He kind of reconciled the fact and he'd get us something. Well he wanted money and we held out our hand and he got most of what he wanted for sure. And he stops in a little old town and disappears. In a few minutes he comes back and he had us a bag of fish and chips each. Over there they put them in a newspaper, just a damn newspaper. So we had fish and chips at midnight. Damn, they were good.

DM:

A long way from Estacado.

TF:

We were a long way.

DM:

So very different, oh boy. When you came back—did you say it was '55 when you came back? Were they doing irrigation here by then?

TF:

Yeah, there was irrigation when I left.

DM:

When did it start?

TF:

Oh, about '47.

DM:

Forty-seven, okay.

TF:

Forty-six.

DM:

Yeah.

TF:

A few earlier than that, but being here it started about '47.

DM:

Did y'all irrigate up at Estacado, in the land up there?

TF:

We put our first well in, in 1947.

DM:

I guess the difference is night and day, explain it to me. I mean, now it doesn't matter how much of a drought you had, you could pull up the water.

TF:

Well say we had real good water in '47. The wells weren't too deep. The war was over, and what we used was a Cadillac motor with a transmission on it, an automatic transmission on it that would come out of a PT boat. And this thing was waterproof. The starter was waterproof, everything was found in the system was waterproof. This was all new and this thing was gasoline. So we had gas tanks set in the side and the line running toward it, but we stayed up for that water day and night. Hell, we were up all night long and all of us had a pretty good pickup. We had a spotlight on it. If you were out messing with your water and you were caught up and nothing to do when you're trying to plant a spotlight over there and somebody else has seen it, we'd get together and we'd shoot the water.

DM:

Were you just staying up to keep the pump running? Is that what you were doing?

TF:

Well, we thought that you had to watch everything. And now you set the water at six o'clock this evening and you don't think about that darn thing until six o'clock in the morning. But back then we were in that learning curve. We sat up with it, we stayed with it, we were up all night long.

DM:

Was that common to use a PT motor; a Cadillac motor from a PT boat?

TF:

Whatever the army was getting rid of, that's what we—and then Chrysler built IND-40, it was a six-cylinder flat head and was a pretty good motor, but was hell to start. I've changed the generators on those old things without killing engines because it's too damn hard to start. You could work and it doesn't start the damn thing. I mean, it would just make you cry. It had two

sets of points on it; the restrictor had two sets of damn points. And we got smart with just running one set of points and we put a piece of cardboard behind the other one. And when that set of points burned up then you'd pull the cardboard out, but they were hell to start.

DM:

Well, if you went from farm to farm back then they might have different kind of motors all together that they were using to pump up that water, those army surplus.

TF:

A lot of old Chevrolet motors. There was a lot of Chevrolet.

DM:

When did you start crop dusting?

TF:

Fifty-five.

DM:

Had you learned to fly while you were in the air force?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay, so you came back and made a career out of that.

TF:

Their crop dusting was kind of a unique thing back then. There were old—you could buy an old Stearman airplane pretty cheap and you took the front cockpit out of it and you put the tank up there.

DM:

The tank that held your pesticides or whatever you used?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

And most of them were transits, they were here. There wasn't anybody here permanent. American Dusting out of Plano would come here every summer and sit out here in the pasture and do work. So, went in the business and stuff, some dusting. Eventually it got to where there was a crop duster in every little town. And now they've thinned out; there's not hardly any left.

DM:

Now why have they thinned out?

TF:

All this poison, all these herbicides, what have you, and they've all bought Hi-Boys and those kind of things.

DM:

Hi-Boys?

TF:

Yeah, it's a tractor spray. It's a sprayer that's a self-propelled sprayer.

DM:

Okay. What about regulations? I assume that federal regulations have really, really increased over this kind of thing in the last sixty years.

TF:

Well, we all tried to be pretty legal.

DM:

So it was pretty well-regulated back then?

TF:

FAA was high-regiment.

DM:

FFAA?

TF:

FAA, Federal Aviation. And we didn't have a waiver. We got a waiver to fly below a thousand foot of the highest option. We had to have a waiver from the FAA to let us get below a thousand foot. There were pretty—your military reputation and if you're trying to be legal and you kept

your equipment up to shape and what have you, they wasn't any problem. You didn't see much of them.

DM:
Okay.

TF:
There was people that tried to beat the system, you know, and then they got beaten.

DM:
How long were you in the crop dusting business?

TF:
Twenty-three years.

DM:
Oh really? Okay, is this your sign over here, "Lorenzo Flying Service"?

TF:
Huh?

DM:
Is this your sign?

TF:
Yeah.

DM:
Lorenzo Flying Service was your company? Can you tell the story about making smoke on the recorder?

TF:
Things over fifty inches, the Stearman airplane originally came with a two-twenty line engine. And to carry a bigger load, we converted over to four fifty platinum windmills. They were a nine-cylinder and a big old engine and real strong and real dependable. The crop dusting business—a lot of people, when they'd hire me to go spray something, they wanted to know exactly what time you were going to be there because they wanted to watch you, if you were going to get killed they wanted to see. So, you know—and then attention is part of salesmanship and we were spraying. We took some oxygen tanks out of military airplanes. Back in the fifties there's all kind military hardware that you could buy. We'd take those old oxygen tanks and put

them in the baggage compartment and we'd run the lines and then up to the exhaust tank, and they'd run through the cockpit; if you had a lever here you could control the contents of that tank. We would pump that tank up with air and if we were flying near a highway or where more people were, you could mop this little lever in the cockpit and spread all that exhaust back and in a smoke ball.

DM:

So it looked like your plane was on fire?

TF:

And then people would applaud that you don't crash and stop traffic on the highway; a good ways they'd stop and watch. Well, that was advertising, we were just advertising.

DM:

Yeah, did y'all do any acrobatics up there just for the fun of it?

TF:

Oh, we pulled some stunts every once in a while.

DM:

Because in a biplane like that, it was pretty acrobatic, isn't it?

TF:

Well, that old thing had been modified and it was rigged to carry a load. We could turn; the turns were kind of acrobatics. You'd put it up with long turns. You could turn quicker that way. We bought an old airplane in Oklahoma City, an old Howard Airplane⁴. It was a single-engine airplane and had a four fifty horsepower engine on it. It had been used to bootleg in Oklahoma and belonged to the law and we bought that old airplane and it had been sitting there in Oklahoma City in the airport there. It had been sitting there a good long while. But anyhow, we got up there and had a little airplane and a couple of us, three of us, went up there and we got that old Howard fueled up and running out, and it'd run okay, and everything checked out okay. The old fabric was bad. We had a pilot with us and so we decided we were going to let him fly the thing home the next morning because he was a drinker. We knew he drank, but we didn't think he had that much money, but anyhow—we'd come home. And about noon the next day we're hearing this old Howard. I was drinking coffee in the drug store down there and we hear this old Howard, it'd come into town and it had changed the pitch and it was roaring and he was going around and around the water towers. And beer cans were just raining out of the floor out of that old Howard.

⁴ The Howard DGA-8, DGA-9, DGA-11, and DGA-12 were a family of four-place, single-engine, high-wing light monoplanes built by the Howard Aircraft Corporation, Chicago, Illinois from 1936.

DM:

I guess he landed safely, huh?

TF:

So he was telling us that he was home—to come to the airport and pick him up—but it was just raining beer cans.

DM:

What airport did y'all operate out of, by the way?

TF:

We were right where you turn, up in the field in the cemetery, just across the road. That was a pasture at that time.

DM:

By the way, when you were crop dusting what were you doing? Were you dropping pesticide and then defoliants in the fall?

TF:

Yeah, we run pesticides, and sometimes we would go spray ranches and spray brush.

DM:

Spray brush, okay.

TF:

And I got associated with Leonard Brothers' Department Stores down in Fort Worth, and we started in early May spraying pecan trees. They had a lot of pecan trees.

DM:

I didn't know that, where were the pecan trees located?

TF:

Well, they had pecan trees in Granbury; they had big pecan trees in Granbury, about six thousand. They had some in Oklahoma, some in Bastrop.

DM:

I had no idea that Leonard Brothers was involved in pecans.

TF:

Oh, they were the pecan masters.

DM:

Well that sounds like a better contract than you would get in all the small farms around here.

TF:

We had a little competition going with A&M. The pecan tree doesn't get all the zinc that it needs. It needs more zinc than it can take up in its root system so we were slowing feeding them with zinc. Leonard's had found out about this and they were putting on zinc with mist blowers, which is a thousand gallons an acre, and we could do the same thing with three gallons per acre. So where it'd take them a plow to get across to the ground rigs, we'd fly an orchard in one day. And then A&M was monitoring us. Their pecan division was monitoring the hell out of us. They'd come out and pull leaf samples and analyze it and do their work. So we worked for Leonard's a long time.

DM:

How interesting. So it wasn't all just local farms you were spraying, it was off various places.

TF:

We sprayed for the Canadian Government.

DM:

Brush?

TF:

No, spruce. The spruce tree gets a mud worm in it. We would fly from here to Old Town, Maine and then turn north and go up into Canada. And they had camps built in the woods up there. Mess hall, bunk houses, recreation places. You could go up there and send them old airplanes up there and spray better ones. You sprayed two airplanes in formation. If there were two airplanes up there flying, then they had an observation plane that was flying up above you and he was ready for the pilot's benefit. If you had any trouble, there wasn't no place to land. We left an airplane, it didn't get to the ground, it had like twenty feet to get to the ground.

DM:

What do you mean?

TF:

Well, the spray system is pulled by a fan and a blade come off the fan and went through the oil cooler made the oil spill out of the airplane. When the engine was acting up and he knew it, when he was saying he couldn't make it anywhere else he just put the nose down and let that old four-fifty engine make her plow into that spruce.

DM:

Golly, did he come out all right?

TF:

Yeah.

DM:

Good.

TF:

And this observation plane is just sitting up there watching him all and they had a helicopter coming, and they reached down there with a bucket picking him up.

DM:

That turned out all right then.

TF:

Yeah, that's what that observation plane is for.

DM:

It's a rescue operation if necessary.

TF:

They picked him up and he come out of there without a scratch. That airplane, it was a long ways off the ground. I have pictures of it. They told how long it would get—I forgot now, it seemed like two weeks' worth of [inaudible] to get to it before you could load it and take it out. It wasn't worth it, it wasn't worth it.

DM:

Well it sounds like an exciting career, but kind of dangerous.

TF:

Oh, you know flying is really hours and hours and hours of boredom. A bunch of waiting with fleeting moments of stark terror.

DM:

Oh, that's well put.

TF:

There's nothing more boring to me than a damn airplane and starting to Fort Worth and you climb up to altitude and then just nothing to do, you're just sitting there, you're watching intervals. It's boring as hell.

DM:

You still fly any?

TF:

No.

DM:

Okay.

TF:

Medical, can't; medical.

DM:

Well, I've exhausted my questions this morning. Do you have anything else to add on anything we've talked about?

TF:

No.

DM:

Okay, let me turn this off.

Tape ends.